

This Document Contains:

**UNACCEPTABLE SYSTEMS
SUGGESTED MEDIUMS OF EXCHANGE
SUGGESTED CODING METHODS
DISTRIBUTION
COLLECTION
POINT-OF-SERVICE**

UNACCEPTABLE MEAL COUNT SYSTEMS

Meal count systems that are **NOT** acceptable because they do not provide a daily count, at the point of service of reimbursable meals, by category, include:

Attendance counts - using the number of students in attendance as a meal count. This does not provide a count of meals actually served and those are the only meals that may be claimed for reimbursement.

Tray or entree counts - counting the number of trays or entrees used during the meal service to obtain the meal count. This does not provide an accurate count of reimbursable meals - only trays and entrees. There are no controls to ensure that trays contain all the necessary food items, that trays were not stuck together, that each entree was part of a complete meal, etc. Each meal must be monitored to ensure that all the meal pattern requirements have been met.

Classroom counts - counting the number of students in the class who indicate that they intend to eat a meal (prior to the meal service itself). Students "intending" to eat may not actually do so. The count taken prior to the meal service will not reflect those changes and the count of meals served may not be accurate. Also, there are no controls at the point of service to ensure that the meals counted are actually reimbursable.

Counts taken anywhere other than at the point of service (unless otherwise approved by the State agency). The only place an accurate count of reimbursable meals can be made is at the point where it can be determined that the meals are actually reimbursable.

Cash converted to meals - using cash totals to determine the number of meals served. This does not provide a count of reimbursable meals served. Also, this allows cash collection errors to translate into meal count errors.

Category/cash back-out system - one or more of the meal categories are calculated by subtracting the number of meals of one or more meal categories (free, reduced price, or paid) from the total meal count to get a count of another meal category.

Delivery counts of meals produced off-site - the number of meals delivered to a school is

not necessarily the number of meals that were actually served.

Any of the acceptable example systems described in the handbook that are not implemented properly. Even if the system is approved on paper, all necessary procedures must be followed in order for the meal count system to be acceptable. All appropriate staff should be adequately trained in their responsibilities.

SUGGESTED MEDIUMS OF EXCHANGE

SYSTEM:	ADVANTAGES:	DISADVANTAGES:
Verbal Identifier	<p>Cannot be lost, stolen, or destroyed.</p> <p>Documentation of meal count is produced during meal service as names/numbers are marked off on a roster or number sheet.</p> <p>If used with a number sheet may be a fast method.</p>	<p>Can be used by another student or twice by the same student if more than one serving line.</p> <p>Coded roster sheet is time consuming for cashiers using manual systems. (Except in schools where students arrive in the cafeteria by class).</p> <p>Students may forget their numbers, thus slowing down the line.</p>
Coded ticket/token	<p>When collected at point of service, provides a means of physically counting meals by category.</p> <p>When used in small-to-medium schools, counts by category can be completed quickly after the meal service.</p>	<p>Can be destroyed, transferred, stolen, lost or sold.</p> <p>In large schools, too cumbersome to collect count of all tickets or tokens by category after the meal service.</p> <p>If not coded properly, may result in overt identification.</p>
Coded I.D. Cards	<p>Not easily transferred if photo is on the card.</p> <p>Can be incorporated as function of student ID card, which may be a savings to school district.</p>	<p>Can be lost, stolen, or destroyed.</p> <p>May be able to be used twice if there are more than one serving line.</p> <p>Possible high replacement cost.</p>
Automated Tab	<p>Saves time because count is taken simultaneously with collection of tickets.</p>	<p>Can be destroyed, stolen, or transferred.</p> <p>Machine may malfunction.</p> <p>Requires a manual backup system.</p>

Coded bar line card	Provides accurate count and saves time; compiles the meal count by category at the same time the students are counted Prevents overt identification on the line. Provides automated reports.	Can be lost, destroyed, stolen transferred, or sold. Start up and operating costs may be high If more than one service line, there may be two meals claimed if the electronic machines not linked.
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1. *Adapted from Chuckwagon Roundup, Texas Education Agency 1989.*

SUGGESTED CODING METHODS

When determining how the checklists, tickets, tokens or student ID cards will be coded, consider the following suggested coding methods.

Method	Examples
* Coded Series	1 through 1,999=free; 2,000 through 3,999=reduced; 4,000 through 5,999=paid.
* Student Number	Number ending 0, or in an odd or even number for free, reduced and paid.
* Coded Variations	Variations in student's or teacher's name display such as Mary Smith, Mary J. Smith and M. Smith or variations in date placement or format such as 10/2/90, 10-2-90. and 10-2-1990.
* Subtle Coding Differences	Differences in printing such as capital letter, period, spacing of a line, or differences in underlining.
* Number of Digits Coding	Four digits for free, five digits for reduced price or six digits for paid.

Additional suggestions include changing the coding system yearly to prevent the use of a previous year's tickets and token; and **whenever possible** using a code other than a single-symbol code such as A, B, C; X, Y, Z; or 1, 2, 3; in that these are most easily recognized by students as a code.

Color coding by category and obvious identifiers such as F, R, P, are prohibited.

DISTRIBUTION

All meal count/collection systems must include a method for prepayment and/or post billing. Post billing (charging) is seldom recommended. The provision for allowing for prepayment (and/or charging) should make free and reduced-price meal recipients appear as students who have prepaid full price.

The option of prepayment (and/or charging) of meals should be routinely publicized. This may be done by using methods such as by posting signs, making public announcements, including the information in printed material, etc. Some districts offer incentives for prepayment options when cash

is also accepted on the serving line.

When distributing tickets or tokens use a common location and time where all students (free, prepaid reduced price and prepaid full price) are required to obtain their tickets, tokens, etc, allow adequate time and area for purchase or pick up of the tickets to prevent overt identification.

COLLECTION

Use common serving area, dining areas, and serving times for all students during meal serving. Use the same procedures for accepting the medium of exchange and for counting free, prepaid reduced and prepaid full price meals to prevent overt identification.

POINT-OF-SERVICE

A point-of-service meal count as defined by regulations means, "that point in the food service operation when a determination can accurately be made that a reimbursable free, reduced price or paid lunch has been served to an eligible child."

Counts taken in the classroom, morning lunch participation counts, the number of tickets sold/issued, head counts, and counts obtained by "backing into" the number of lunches served are not point-of-service counts.

Any alternate counting/collection procedure must provide for someone stationed at the end of the serving line monitoring the meals selected to ensure that each meal claimed for reimbursement meets meal pattern requirement. In addition, the procedure must provide a method for removing, from the proper category of the count used for claiming reimbursement, any meal which is not reimbursable. The above is also true of any system which stations the cashier/ticket taker/counter at the beginning of the line.